Introduction

On October 13, 2011, the U.S. Department of State published notification in the Federal Register of the receipt of a request from the Government of Belize to the Government of the United States of America for import restrictions on archaeological and ethnological material from Belize dating to the Pre-ceramic through Spanish Colonial periods (9000 B.C. to A.D. 1798). This request is submitted pursuant to Article 9 of the *1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* as implemented by the *Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act*.

The following public summary, authorized by Belize, is derived from that request. It does not necessarily represent the position of the Government of the United States on this matter.

In its request, Belize offers a brief history of human settlement within its borders, an analysis of the pillage of its archaeological and ethnological materials, a description of its efforts to mitigate the problem, a summary of the international trade in Belizean cultural material, and a view of the benefits that import restrictions might confer.

PUBLIC SUMMARY

Request by the Government of Belize to the United States of America for Imposing Import Restrictions to Protect its Cultural Patrimony under Article 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention

Historically, the country of Belize has taken great measures to prevent the pillage of archaeological sites including the creation of one of the most comprehensive cultural resource management plans in the Americas; yet these efforts are not enough to stem the tide of archaeological and ethnographic materials that continue to be pillaged and irretrievably lost to international markets. The illicit trade in antiquities has resulted in their increased value and subsequent looting of more archaeological sites. Controls must be established by the United States as one of the major consumers of Maya objects in order to lessen the motivation for these clandestine activities. U.S. import restrictions would not only help to reduce the economic incentive for this theft, but also serve to promote the conservation and protection of sites by complementing and strengthening the effectiveness of existing Belizean laws and those of neighboring countries with which the U.S. maintains existing bilateral agreements.

Over 1,000 Maya sites (of an estimated 2,000 prehistoric and historic sites) have been documented in Belize, the second smallest country in Central America with an area of 8,867 square miles. Sites range from large cities such as Lamanai, Xunantunich,

and Caracol, to smaller residential settlements such as Cuello and K'axob. Scientific excavation of archaeological sites in Belize contributes to our knowledge of the formation, growth, and decline of ancient Maya civilization in addition to the unwritten accounts of Maya encounters with the Spanish during the early Colonial period. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Maya sites and artifacts from Belize have been the subject of long-term scholarly investigation, particularly by American archaeologists and art historians. Each year, over 300 students from American universities come to Belize to receive field school instruction in a politically safe climate where English is the national language. Tourists from around the world travel to Belize every year to witness first-hand the Maya ruins and to view artifacts in on-site museums. The protection of the cultural patrimony of Belize is beneficial to all and helps to ensure the preservation of a shared world heritage.

Summary of the Cultural History of Belize

Pre-ceramic period (9000-2000 BC)

The earliest evidence for human presence in Belize has been found at ephemeral coastal sites occupied by nomadic and seasonal hunting and gathering peoples. Archaic stone tools include projectile points for hunting, choppers and adzes for canoe building, net weights for fishing, and grinding stones and stone bowls for seed processing. Artifacts from the Pre-ceramic period in Belize are morphologically similar to contemporaneous objects representing South American and Caribbean cultures.

Preclassic period (2000-100 BC)

About 4,000 years ago, the earliest sedentary Maya agricultural villages began to emerge along Belize's many river valleys. The residents of K'axob and other sites located around Pulltrouser Swamp in northern Belize used innovative techniques to transform the wetlands into agricultural plots allowing year-round cultivation even in the dry season. In central Belize, the ancient Maya terraced the slopes of the Maya Mountains making them farmable. Cultivated crops such as maize and beans and orchard agriculture were added to a subsistence repertoire that already included exploitation of abundant wild plant, fish, mollusk, and game resources. The Preclassic was a time of social stratification, characterized by the transition from regulation by lineage heads to the birth of city-states dominated by an emergent elite class of divine kings. By 200 BC, the political climate of Belize began to change as pyramid construction began at sites such as Nohmul, San Estevan, Cerros, and Lamanai. Elaboration in mortuary ritual increased at this time and status was reflected in the quality of grave goods. Belizean centers participated in long distance exchange networks during the Preclassic as evidenced by the presence of Olmec-style blue-green jade objects from the Gulf Coast of Mexico at Cuello, Moho Cay, Cerros, and Kendal. Jade and obsidian objects from the Guatemalan highlands have been excavated at both small residential and large ceremonial sites in Belize suggesting widespread integration into coastal and overland trade networks.

As the population of Belize grew, settlements became more restricted in their resource procurement zones and trade networks became more formalized. Specialized craft production demonstrates a high level of control over valued resources and labor, and sites like Colha yielded high-quality, standardized tools estimated to have been produced by the millions and distributed over great distances to Preclassic centers in the Peten of Guatemala including Tikal and El Mirador. Stemmed macroblades, tranchet bits, lanceolate points, and oval bifaces of easily recognizable honey-colored Colha chert were produced by a burgeoning middle class of toolmakers.

As a result of restricted access to resources, Late Preclassic ceramics were generally produced for on-site use, resulting in local expressions of identity that took the form of experimentation in decoration. Pottery of the Preclassic period comes in a variety of innovative and whimsical forms and styles with spouts, flanges, feet, and painted and incised designs.

Classic period (100 BC-AD 850)

The Maya Classic period is traditionally marked by the appearance of carved monuments bearing inscriptions detailing the political activities of a ruling elite class. The 26 stelae at the site of Nim Li Punit in southern Belize record events that occurred between AD 721 and 790, including the visitation of a Nim Li Punit ruler to the city of Copan in Honduras to conduct rituals.

During the Early Classic, the Maya of Belize participated in far-reaching political and economic spheres spanning from the Peten region of Guatemala to the primate center of Teotihuacan in central Mexico. Green obsidian from the central Mexican source of Pachuca (believed to have been controlled by Teotihuacan) has been recovered at a number of sites in Belize including Nohmul, Altun Ha, and Tiger Cave. The presence of Teotihuacan-style tripod cylinder vessels with lids at numerous sites in Belize also reaffirms trade with this Early Classic superpower. As in the previous period, jade and obsidian objects continued to be imported from the Guatemalan highlands. The largest jadeite sculpture from the Maya area, weighing almost 10 lbs, was scientifically excavated from a tomb in the main pyramid at Altun Ha and represents the Maya sun god.

Belizean sites participated in Classic period trade overland and sea. Located on the modem border of Guatemala, the ancient cities of El Pilar and Xunantunich stood strategically in the trade corridor between the Peten and the Caribbean Sea. To the south Caracol, with its intricate system of ancient raised roads, also served as an important node in the trade route. At its height, Caracol had an estimated population of over 150,000 (more than half of the current population of the entire country) and its political dominance is represented by its military defeat of the major city-state of Tikal to the west in AD 562. Investigations of the extensive urban area surrounding the ceremonial core of Caracol have revealed the existence of a middle class composed of warriors, tool-makers, and artisans engaged in such specialized crafts as shell-working.

Finely painted polychrome vessels of the Early and Late Classic are contrasted with utilitarian wares represented by monochrome bowls and striated jars of standardized forms and sizes. The Late Classic period saw a revival of ceramic innovation and experimentation, as evident in the large-scale production of modeled hollow figurine whistles at the site of Lubaantun in southern Belize.

Tool production at Colha continued during the Classic period, but not at the level that it once sustained during the Preclassic period, perhaps as a result of a shift in production to the neighboring center of Altun Ha. Carefully crafted "eccentrics" - chert objects shaped into anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and geometric forms - appeared in ritual caches during the Classic period at Altun Ha, Xunantunich, and sites in northern Belize.

The Late Classic was a time of ambitious construction projects and rapid population growth in Belize, but the Terminal Classic was characterized by political upheaval and warfare. By the end of the Classic period, many of the major centers became rapidly depopulated and new construction projects ceased. Much of the population shifted to smaller, more dispersed settlements. Centers in northern Belize such as Lamanai, however, show continuous occupation and economic revival during the Classic to Postclassic transition.

Postclassic period (AD 850-1544)

While Maya cities elsewhere declined, centers such as Lamanai and Santa Rita Corozal in northern Belize continued to flourish without interruption into the Postclassic. In fact, the Early Postclassic at Lamanai was a period of economic growth and increased long-distance trade. Late Postclassic murals from Santa Rita Corozal have stylistic similarities to the Mixteca-Puebla style, suggesting Central Mexican contact. Gold and turquoise mosaic ear flares discovered in a burial at Santa Rita Corozal also suggest long-distance trade during this period.

Postclassic pottery is distinctive with forms such as chalices, bowls and jars with high pedestal bases, and incense burners with modeled effigy decorations. Postclassic painted ceramic effigy figures have been discovered in ritual caches at Santa Rita Corozal and in a Maya cache inside the Spanish church at Lamanai.

Spanish Colonial period (AD 1544-1798)

The first half of the 16th century was characterized by intermittent contact between the Spanish conquistadors and the Maya of Belize, concentrated in encomienda (Spanish land grant areas for tributary labor) towns such as Lamanai, Santa Rita Corozal, and Tipu. The Spanish considered Belize a backwater, only suitable for cutting logwood, and thus Spanish contact was limited to a few *visitas*, or regional churches, where Spanish priests would make infrequent circuits in efforts to convert the Maya to Catholicism.

Spanish Colonial settlements in Belize provide valuable information regarding nominal Spanish control of the Maya. Several recorded historical events characterize

Spanish oppression and Maya rebellion during this period including: the *reducción* (forced resettlement) of the Maya in 1544, the establishment of a Spanish mission at Lamanai in 1570, the Maya rebellion which forced Spain to largely abandon the area in 1638, and the forced resettlement of the Maya residents of Tipu to Lago Peten Itza in Guatemala in 1707. This period ended when the Spanish were defeated by the British at the Battle of St. George's Caye in 1798 which marks the beginning of the British Colonial period.

Archaeological investigations of Spanish Colonial sites in Belize are bringing to light invaluable new data regarding the resistance and subsequent continuity of culture of Maya peoples living on the Spanish Colonial frontier. Recent studies suggest that Colonial Maya settlement was much more dispersed than was previously imagined, with European objects being incorporated into Maya contexts on a regular basis. Because of the continuous occupation of Maya sites during the Contact period on the Belizean frontier, Maya and Spanish Colonial artifacts are found side-by-side, so that the looting of a Spanish Colonial site results in the concomitant loss of Maya cultural data in such mixed contexts.

Spanish Colonial Maya ceramics include many decorative wares with distinctive attributes such as notched basal flanges, bulbous supports with large vents, and small bowls with exterior grooves beneath their rims. In Belize, other Spanish artifacts recovered archaeologically from this period include glass beads, objects of metal, and Spanish wheel-made pottery such as majolica and olive jars.

Other Information Provided by the Government of Belize

In its request, Belize states that despite vigilant efforts on its part to safeguard cultural property, the problem of pillage continues. The ongoing demand for Maya antiquities encourages destruction of archaeological sites in Belize. Currently, Belize is the only country in the Maya region that does not have a bilateral agreement with the United States to prevent the import of archaeological and ethnographic materials into the US. This situation makes Belize a loophole for trafficking looted objects. Belize states that the U.S. is the primary market destination for Belizean cultural property.

Belize states that it has taken efforts to protect archaeological reserves, and that these steps have deterred looting of major sites to some extent. Looting continues, however, particularly at certain sites that have the potential to yield valuable information about the activities of ancient Maya people not recorded in the written inscriptions of the elite. These irreplaceable data are lost when artifacts are ripped from their context and sold for their aesthetic value on the black market.

Belize states that it has one of the most comprehensive statutes in Central America governing the protection of archaeological resources. Legal safeguards for Belizean cultural property began as early as extend back to 1894. The Department of Archaeology (later the Institute of Archaeology), which has responsibility for the

protection of archaeological resources in Belize, was established in 1955. A comprehensive cultural property protection law was passed in 1971 and the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) was formed in 2000. The Institute of Archaeology undertakes numerous activities to safeguard and promote Belizean cultural property, including monitoring excavations, issuing permits for international loans of cultural property (including for recent exhibits in the U.S.), working with other government agencies to protect cultural property, raising public awareness, and managing archaeological sites. Despite protective measures such as armed security guards at designated archaeological reserves, clearly communicated park regulations, licensed tour guides, law enforcement training, and other efforts, looting continues at archaeological sites. Finally, Belize states that significant research is being conducted by foreign, including U.S., researchers in Belize on all aspects of Belize's cultural heritage.